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ABSTRACT

To determine what messages women found in magazines regarding their roles in society in the late eighteenth century, a study analyzed three magazines: "The Ladies Magazine" (1792-93), "The American Magazine" (1787-88), and "The (Philadelphia) Weekly Magazine" (1798-99). All three featured a mixture of essays, verse, literary excerpts, foreign and domestic news, reports of births, deaths, and marriages, and other material. The study sought to determine if the publications portrayed women as political actors (much as the leading party newspapers of that era were doing), how they defined women's role, and if they challenged conventional wisdom on women's place. The analysis revealed that none of the magazines portrayed women as politically active in any meaningful way. Such discussion was infrequent and isolated, and when it did occur, the connection had to be inferred because of the vague nature of the commentary. Generally, the message in the magazine was that women's place was in the home where the primary goal was to be amiable and compliant. Most talk of women influencing men was framed in relation to the reformation of women's manners and keeping them happy at home. Although women's education was discussed at length, the education was only utilitarian and limited to prevent women from rising above their husbands in any way or neglecting their "natural" duties. Overall, these publications were preservers of the status quo, rather than challengers of it. (HOD)

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Magazine Portrayals of Women's Role in the New Republic

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Magazine Portrayals of Women's Role in the New Republic

Although women in the new American republic in the 1790s were considered apolitical, party newspapers were contributing to the inclusion of women in the political arena. While the major theorists of the Enlightenment and the American Revolution had not explored the possibility that women were part of the people, the republic's leading party press editors, William Cobbett and Benjamin Franklin Bache, were doing just that (Kerber, 1980; List, 1985).

As newly formed political parties, Federalists and Republicans, shaped the future of American government, other more subtle changes were taking place in society, including changes in perceptions of women's role. Women in the new republic were, it is true, considered subservient to their husbands: their right to hold property was restricted, they could not vote, and they generally were denied higher education. Their place was at home (Kerber, 1980; Lerner, 1979; Withey, 1981).

Thinking on women's role, however, had advanced to include the ideas that women could wield political power through influencing their husbands and sons and that better educated women made more valuable helpmates and more competent teachers. Benjamin Rush, a lecturer at the Young Ladies' Academy of Philadelphia, epitomized this attitude:

> The equal share that every citizen has in the liberty and possible share he may have in the government of our country make it necessary that our ladies should be qualified. . .

> to concur in instructing their sons in the principles of liberty and government. . . [Woman's life is] dedicated to the service of civic virtue: She educates her sons for it, she condemns and corrects her husband's lapses from it (Kerber, 1980, p. 228).

Rush in so saying echoed the sentiments of Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote in her Vindication of the Rights of Women in 1792:

> Would men but generously snap our chains and be content with rational fellowships instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers--in a word, better citizens (Berg, 1978, p. 18).

Cobbett in his Porcupine's Gazette and Bache in his Aurora saw in such arguments an opportunity to put women to use in service of their respective political parties. Since the papers were the primary conveyors of contemporary political information and opinion for literate Americans, they added early on to changes in thinking that led to women's entry into political life in the next century (List, 1985).

Cobbett, a Tory who supported the Federalist party of Adams and Hamilton, and Bache, a Republican who championed Jefferson and Madison, did not cover women to any great extent because they were not directly involved in the political process. What little women read about their role in politics, however, encouraged them to offer themselves as rewards for correct political behavior and to withhold their favors--or even secure divorces--from husbands whose politics were not correct. Women should "turn in patriotic disdain from the wretch who calumniates the government of his

country," Cobbett wrote in support of the Federalist party (Gazette, 1798, July 14; July 27). Bache disagreed with Cobbett's politics but not the principle concerning women's involvement. Women should adhere to opposition party members, he wrote: "The ladies are thus made the reward, of valor" (Aurora, 1798, November 19). If women rewarded men in the "proper" political party, they might avoid becoming victims of the other, both editors agreed. They also considered more direct political activity acceptable when undertaken on behalf of the "right" party (List, 1985).

These editors clearly were intent on nothing more than advancing their own politics, but their portrayal of women had much broader implications. Their consistent depiction of women as objects of reward and/or victimization reinforced contemporary images of women as secondary and subservient to men. At the same time, however, the editors popularized the idea that women were political actors with parts to play (List, 1985).

This message was sent to the women who read political newspapers in the latter part of the decade. Although 50 percent of women remained illiterate through 1800, those who could read turned to devotional literature, history, biography, and periodicals (Lockridge, 1974; Nye, 1960). "It is a happy revolution in the history of the fair sex that they are now in general readers," The Ladies Magazine said, "and what is better, thinkers too" (Ladies Magazine, March 1793, p. 171). Many of those who read periodicals probably would have preferred magazines to political newspapers for the same reason that Miss

Morland in Jane Austen's Northanger Abbey liked novels--not history:

> I read [history] a little as a duty, but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars or pestilences, in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all (Kerber, 1980, p. 258).

This paper explores what message women found in magazines regarding their roles in society. While newspapers were for the most part ignoring women readers, several magazines were seeking them out. Did these publications portray women as political actors as did the newspapers? How did they define women's role, knowing that they were speaking in large part to women themselves? Did they challenge conventional wisdom and contribute to what one historian said by the 1770s had become a "developing undercurrent of discontent" (Sapiro, 1983)?

The magazines studied were: The Ladies Magazine (1792-93), The American Magazine (1787-88), and The (Philadelphia) Weekly Magazine (1798-99). All three were miscellanies on the model of successful British publications, featuring a mixture of essays, verse, literary excerpts, foreign and domestic news, reports of births, deaths and marriages, and other material.

The Ladies Magazine and Repository of Entertaining Knowledge was selected for study because it was the only periodical directed specifically to women in the 1790s and because it was published in Philadelphia, capital of the new republic and home to the papers of Cobbett and Bache (Roff, 1982). The magazine was published by William Gibbons and edited by "A Literary Society."

Its first volume included an "Original Plan," which read in part: "Essays, calculated to regulate the taste, form the judgment, and improve the mind, will constitute its chief ornament" (Ladies Magazine, June 1792).

The American Magazine also was studied because "[w]omen receive more attention in [it] than had been given them in any previous work of the kind" (Mott, 1930, vol. 1, p. 105). In Noah Webster's introduction to his publication, he addressed himself to women readers:

> . . . and his fair readers may be assured that no inconsiderable pains will be taken to furnish them with entertainment; at the same time, he flatters himself that many of the Ladies, who are favorites of Minerva and the Muses, will be found in the number of his correspondents (American Magazine, December 1787, p. 3).

The first letter in the new publication was from Jemima Loveleap (probably Webster), who wrote:

> You must know, Sir, that we females have many good ideas to communicate as well as the men; but talking will not answer the purpose; our opinions must be committed to paper, before they have their proper effect and your Magazine is the place (American Magazine, December 1787, p. 26).

Recognized as an editor and political thinker, Webster had complained about women reading material from abroad, so the magazine, which was published in New York and which circulated to about 500 people, offered an opportunity for him to provide them more suitable republican reading. Historian Frank Luther Mott

called the magazine "an interpreter of its times," and Webster's definition of women's role would have carried weight (Mott, 1930, vol. 1, p. 107).

Finally, The Weekly Magazine, of Original Essays, Fugitive Pieces, and Interesting Intelligence was explored because it was published in Philadelphia contemporaneously with Cobbett's and Bache's newspapers. The magazine was printed for Ezekiel Forman by [illegible] Maxwell. An "Address" in the August 1798 issue stated:

> All persons possessed of talents for writing, and who have leisure, are respectfully solicited to contribute toward the establishment of a periodical publication that may do credit to the literary talents of our country (Weekly Magazine, August 1798).

Each of the three magazines was read in its entirety for any information delineating women's role in the new republic. The primary components of women's role, according to the magazines, were identified, and the material then was assessed in relation to those components: women and politics, women and education, women and domesticity. Certain themes emerged in each of those areas.

Overall, Mott was correct when he wrote in 1930 that women were being advised how to act so continually by magazines in this era "that at least some of them must have grown very weary of it" (Mott, 1930, vol. 1, p. 65). But for many the material may have stirred the imagination and led to greater self-understanding.

While party papers dealt infrequently with women and politics, their message when the subject was broached was clear. The magazines, on the other hand, included much less political commentary and little discussion of women's relation to politics. Only a few instances were found in which such a relationship was recognized directly. More often the message that women and politics might mix had to be inferred. More often still, the message was just the opposite.

Webster's American Magazine, for example, contained any number of articles on the great political questions of the day, a few of which were tied to women. The first letter by Ms. Loveleap noted that the Constitution would soon be approved and that men then would be better able to support their families: "In short, Sir, the Ladies are generally Federal, and I cannot see a reason why the Gentlemen should be otherwise" (American Magazine, December 1787, p. 27). Women's politics, it seemed, were based on self-interest.

Other references in the magazine implied that women might have a political role, but their meaning was vague. An essay by the Lounger stated: "We see under the form of a woman the virtues and qualities of a man," and the author observed that as a nation advanced from barbarism to civilization, women rose in esteem and held more important stations in society (American Magazine, February 1788, p. 133-36.) In "Importance of Female Education," Webster pointed out that women should "extend their influence as far as possible over the other sex" (American Magazine, May 1788,

p. 368). And a letter from Eliza complained that learned men addressed women of sense equal or superior to their own as if they were idiots: "Let the men of genius and superior talents view us in the light we are entitled to and treat us with due respect and attention" (American Magazine, March 1788, pp. 240-1). What stations women might occupy, how far they might exert their influence and how much respect they deserved were matters left to the imagination.

When the message was that women and politics did not mix, that message tended to be more explicit, such as the one in "An Address to the Ladies" by Alphonso:

> That it may be necessary for political purposes, to consider man as the superior in authority is to me probable . . . A man is pleased with the deference his wife shows for his opinions--he often loves her even for her want of information, when it creates a kind of dependence upon his judgment. . . Do not these facts justify the order of society, and render some difference in rank between the sexes, necessary to the happiness of both (American Magazine, March 1788, p. 245)?

Webster published only a few stories about women who were active politically. They included accounts of a "patriotic society of ladies" in Spain, established with the king's consent to inculcate virtue and industry, and of a woman whose husband had died in battle and whose duty it now was to instill in her son "the emulation of paternal virtue" (American Magazine, April 1788, pp. 316, 326). These examples of women encouraged to exert their influence were countered in November with a story detailing

the fate of another woman who involved herself in politics--the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots (American Magazine, November 1788, p. 843).

Attitudes expressed in the The Ladies Magazine were less supportive of women's involvement in politics than were Webster's. One essay, "On the Art of Being Agreeable," stated:

> If our modern ladies would give themselves the trouble to look back a little upon past ages, and consider the figure which the sex then made, they would meet with women, who were not only good wives, but useful subjects" (Ladies Magazine, April 1793, p. 216).

The author discussed military contributions of women in the past, but then said:

> [W]e have no occasion for the service of the ladies at present. . . I would not look upon them as warriors and heroines; but as wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters" (Ladies Magazine, April 1793, p. 216).

In a year's time, the magazine ran only a handful of pieces that illustrated women's successful political involvement. They included a letter from Queen Elizabeth, a few accounts of the Empress of Russia, a poem about Ella of Norway who slew the marauding King of Sweden, and a piece on a female who disguised herself and "performed the duties of a fresh water sailor in an admirable manner" (Ladies Magazine, September 1792, p. 180; January 1793, p. 187; December 1792, p. 54). The would-be sailor suggested that women be used in the U.S. fleet instead of British sailors, and the magazine called her a heroine. That story,

probably the closest the publication came to endorsing the idea of politically active women, was a two-sentence account on the December issue's last page.

The magazine also ran several stories on women who involved themselves politically with disastrous results, including pieces on Mary Queen of Scots and a letter from Lady Jane Grey to her sister written the night before her execution (Ladies Magazine, September 1792, pp. 179-80). Two tales were included about women who inspired their husbands in battle: one, after her husband died, "expired in insanity"; the other, whose husband was captured, committed suicide in his presence to demonstrate that death was not painful (Ladies Magazine, March 1793, p. 188; April 1793, p. 237).

Nine pages of the "New Publications" section of the September 1792 issue were devoted to excerpts from Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women. "Who made man the exclusive judge if women partake with him the gift of reason" (Ladies Magazine, September 1792, p. 189)? Most of the excerpts dealt with women's education, but that was tied directly to politics at several points:

> To render women truly useful members of society, I argue that they should be led, by having their understandings cultivated on a large scale, to acquire a rational affection for their country, founded on knowledge, because it is obvious that we are little interested about what we do not understand. . . Let women share the rights, and she will emulate the virtues of man (Ladies Magazine, September 1792, pp. 196-97).

The magazine interspersed editorial opinion throughout the piece, its strongest statement being:

> [A]lthough we cannot wholly agree with our fair authoress in all the points she contends for, yet to show her we are much pleased with her work, we shall be pretty copious in our review of it (Ladies Magazine, September 1792, p. 190).

More typical of its position were essays such as the one that quoted Hector:

> Let women preside in all domestic affairs, and let their judgments be decisive in the appointments of fashions; but suffer the politics of nations to be directed by men, and entrust the agency of warlike matters to hands by nature more adapted to its roughness (Ladies Magazine, January 1793, p. 68).

Another essay, "Thoughts on Women," explained why that was sound advice. Women, it said, functioned not by reason but by intuition:

> The philosopher. . . gets to the head of the staircase, if I may say so, by slow degrees, and counting step by step. She arrives at the top of the staircase as well as he; but whether she leaped or flew there, is more than she knows herself. . . she is generally lost when she attempts to reason (Ladies Magazine, August 1792, p. 111).

The Weekly Magazine had far less commentary on women's place because its focus was more literary. It had suspended publication early in 1798 because of a yellow fever epidemic, but prior to that time, it had printed Charles Brockden Brown's

Wollstonecraft-inspired "Alcuin," a dialogue between Alcuin and his hostess, Mrs. Carter. Because the Federalist government had rejected women as irrelevant to the political process, Mrs. Carter told her guest: "No, I am no federalist" (Brown, 1970, p. 30). Men were kept from voting by shortness of residence, poverty, youth or color, she said, but to keep women from voting on the basis of sex was arbitrary and unjust. Alcuin's response was that women were unfit politically but superior in their own sphere.

When the magazine resumed publication in August 1798 under Forman, its message regarding women and politics for the next year sometimes followed the lead of Mrs. Carter, sometimes Alcuin. An essay in the August issue noted that the idea of women being unable to receive, retain, and judge truth was "founded in mere imagination":

> [T]hanks to the growing empire of reason, woman begins to recover her long-lost rights; she rises in the scale of importance, dignity, self-enjoyment, and social utility (Weekly Magazine,, 1798, Aug. 4, p. 13).

In a dialogue between Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Knowles, Johnson mocked the suggestion that women were "accountable creatures," but Mrs. Knowles defended it (Weekly Magazine, 1798, Aug. 18, p. 81). The magazine also included two accounts of women who acquitted themselves in political situations: Catherina, Countess Dowager of Schwartzburg, who exhibited "patriotic concern and determined intripidity" in outfoxing an enemy, and Madame D'Eon, who disguised herself as a man and served as secretary to the French embassy in London (Weekly Magazine, 1799, March 9, p. 279;

March 23, p. 343).

Yet the publication went to considerable length to criticize Wollstonecraft, whose "Quixotic Mania" led her to try to "extend the sphere of female duties and female obligations beyond the boundary which nature, seconded by reason and custom, had presumed to point out":

> [H]owever plainly she may have demonstrated that the order of things has been shamefully reversed, and that nature designed the men to preside at the tea-table, regulate the household, and rule the nursery; while all the offices of state and business of commerce should pass into the hands of the ladies; her theory seems but little likely to succeed (Weekly Magazine, 1799, April 13, pp. 19-20).

All three magazines, then, took similar positions on the question of women's political involvement: for every step forward suggesting that women might have a part to play there were great leaps backward. The positive evidence cited constitutes a relatively small glimmer emanating from the bulk of the editorial content.

The magazines, however, dealt to a greater extent with women's education, and there was considerable agreement among the three. Women had to be educated if they ever hoped to become citizens in the true sense of the word, but the magazines, for the most part, stressed the benefit that would accrue to the spouses and children of educated women.

Women should be educated, all three magazine agreed, to enable them to be more engaging companions to their husbands, more effective teachers of their children, and more efficient domestic engineers. Other themes that emerged from the publications were that women's education should be useful, not frivolous, and that women should never be educated above their stations in life.

Webster's magazine developed all of these themes, beginning with the idea that educated wives were preferable to the uneducated variety. An "Essay on Marriage" pointed out: "Education is as much the source of human felicity as the want of it is common among the fair, which is one of the chief arguments against matrimony" (American Magazine, May 1788, p. 368). "Importance of Female Education" also stressed that women's education should enable them "to implant in the tender mind such sentiments of virtue, propriety, and dignity as are suited to the freedom of our governments" (American Magazine, May 1788, p. 367).

The essay continued by stressing that female education had to be useful. Women should study grammar, arithmetic, composition, geography, music, cookery, and needle-work, among other things. "That education is always wrong," the essay pointed out, "which raises a woman above the duties of her station" (American Magazine, May 1788, pp. 368-69): "However ambitious a woman may be to command admiration abroad, her real merit is known only at home. Admiration is useless, when it is not

supported by domestic worth."

The Ladies Magazine recognized along with Wollstonecraft that if, in fact, men had sounder judgment, the reason was the difference in men's and women's education. Yet the reason to educate women, according to the magazine, was to make them more desirable companions and better housewives. The sometimes disastrous results of contemporary education were spelled out in a letter from L.T.:

> [Women] sing indifferently; they play the harpsichord indifferently; they are mistresses of every common game at cards; they speak a little French; they paint their faces, and have just as much knowledge of dress to deform their persons by an awkward imitation of every new fashion which appears. . . they dance with a grace. . . and they live in the most perfect indifference as to all the common difficulties of life. Placed in a situation of difficulty, they have neither a head to dictate, nor a hand to help at any domestic concern (Ladies Magazine, August 1792, pp. 121-22.)

That education must equip women to function in their department was stressed incessantly in The Ladies Magazine. The message was perhaps most heavy-handed in a series of letters from a brother to his sister at boarding school. The brother felt it necessary to mention his sister's faults, he said, so that she might correct them, and had she imbibed the spirit of his many letters, "you would have been very different from what you are":

> Where is that desire, which I so wished to excite, of your being sensible, good-natured, and intelligent? Where is the

> desire of being useful and pleasing? Where is that gentleness of manners, so characteristic of the well-educated woman (Ladies Magazine, October 1792, p. 233)?

The two purposes of educating women, he said, were to teach them to please and to be useful:

> A girl should be taught, that her peculiar province is to please, and that every deviation from it is opposing the design of nature. . . A girl is to be taught, that a degree of subjection is allotted her. . . It is that state of subjection, for which nature evidently intended the female part of the creation (Ladies Magazine, November 1792, p. 260).

The Weekly Magazine had only one major piece on female education in the year studied. It made many of the same points, but at the same time managed to take a more enlightened view. The publication, for example, recognized that "the strongest, nay the sole and eternal support of this rising republic, must be drawn from the enlightened and virtuous education of both sexes" (Weekly Magazine, 1798, Aug. 4, p. 13). Women's education, however, would most benefit their children and husbands, who depended on their wives to help them develop virtue and decorum.

A proper women's education, the magazine said, should include four areas of study: writing and arithmetic; language; facts, including geography, history, and science; and thinking and moral philosophy. In justifying the latter, the author said:

> What is so immediately connected with personal or social happiness as to know how to think and how to act? to reason

justly and feel virtuously? to distinguish the true from the false (Weekly Magazine, 1798, Aug. 11, p. 39)?

But while women might be taught to think, it was absurd for them to reach for situations for which God never intended them. Women were:

> destined to fill, in delightful succession, the stations of wife and mother, guardian of our rising offspring, counsellor of our busy anxious manhood, and the intellectual charm of our declining years (Weekly Magazine, 1798, Aug. 1, p. 15).

Within the parameters just stated, all three magazines encouraged women to emphasize improving their minds, not their appearances. The beauty of a cultivated mind was lasting, they advised, while physical beauty was transitory. Communicating this message led to some of the publications' most creative pieces. American Magazine stressed the point in verse:

> So much without! can it be sin,
> To say there is not much within?
> Cou'd mother Eve this scene behold.
> She would almost attempt to scold.
> "Are these my children that I see?
> No, they are not, they cannot be.
> What study, what incessant pains,
> To deck a head devoid of brains"
> (American Magazine, July 1788, p. 594).

The Ladies Magazine ran an essay by Amelia who recognized that because she had chosen to rely on her beauty, "I have twelve

years certain for the exercise of all my influence" (Ladies Magazine, July 1792, p. 78). And it criticized women's vanity in a number of pieces, including "Fruitless Search after an Old Woman" (Ladies Magazine, October 1792, pp. 206-09).

The Weekly Magazine also mocked women's emphasis on appearance in "New Way of Preserving a Wife," a story about a man who had discovered how to embalm his ex-wives, leaving them permanently beautiful, quiet and inexpensive. How did the ladies view his discovery?

> "Oh! (answered he) they cannot but approve of my proceedings; for as their whole time, while living, is spent in endeavouring to make themselves look as well as they possibly can, they must of course be pleased at being in high preservation after they are dead" (Weekly Magazine, 1799, March 23, p. 376).

If the magazines' severely limited discussion of women and politics left any question about women's place, their pronouncements on the utility of education and women's sometimes frivolous preference of physical over mental cultivation made it clear that women had but one place and that was at home.

Women and Domesticity

The most frequent lesson forwarded by the magazines in relation to women's life at home was that they should be subservient to their husbands and that they were responsible for maintaining a pleasant and agreeable relationship with their spouses. The model wife--amiable and compliant--permeated the pages

of both American and Ladies magazines, and few other types of women were discussed.

The Weekly Magazine, on the other hand, was somewhat out of the ordinary because it included only one major piece on "pettycoatical" government, entitled "The Domestic Tornado" (Weekly Magazine, 1799, May 4, p. 123). At the same time, the publication ran biographies of eight women writers throughout the year, assessing their work just as the work of male authors was evaluated and providing a different sort of role model for women who might want to engage in activity outside the home.

True to form, The Ladies Magazine made it clear that while deficiency in knowledge might be pardoned, amiable dispositions were indispensable. In fact, it was dangerous for women to be too learned:

> You might be dazzling, but not truly bright,
> A pompous glare, but not a useful light,
> A meteor, not a star, you would appear,
> For woman shines but in her proper sphere
> (Ladies Magazine, September 1792, p. 171).

At home, she made herself happy by making her husband happy. That was accomplished by indulging his love for power and authority and making him the center of attention.

The publication advised women generally to discourage men's licentious behavior, but if a woman's husband found another woman more amiable, it was the wife's fault. She should enter immediately into a strict and impartial review of her own conduct to discover any fault that might have offended or disgusted her spouse. If no such fault could be found, she should begin a

campaign to entice her husband back home. She might pat his cheek with a fan if he returned but should take no sterner measures. "Consider, that men in general would be just what you please to make them" (Ladies Magazine, June 1792, pp. 23-4; September 1792, pp. 177-8).

American Magazine also suggested that women were responsible for the conduct of men other than their husbands. Women should be prepared to prove their virtue before marriage, it said, and those who lost their reputations were disarming themselves, whereupon "thousands consider themselves at liberty to commence an attack" (American Magazine, March 1788, p. 243). Women should polish men's manners, correct their vices, and inspire their hearts with a love of virtue.

Webster also stressed subordination. "A wife should outshine her husband in nothing," he wrote (American Magazine, June 1788, p. 487). For a woman to instruct a man was like "a goose instructing a nightingale to sing" (American Magazine, April 1788, p. 275):

> What enjoyment can be compared with the felicity, flowing from a union with a virtuous woman, who pours out her soul into the bosom of him she loves, who reposes in him with unbounded confidence, and whose great object of ambition it is to soften every care, to alleviate every calamity, what object can be more beautiful, or more engaging than such a woman in the midst of her family, diffusing happiness on all around her (American Magazine, February 1788, p. 136)?

American Magazine probably best summed up all three

publications' attitudes toward women's role in relation to politics and domestic concerns at once:

> One sex is formed for the more hardy exercises of the Council, the field and the laborious employments of procuring subsistence. The other, for the superintendence of domestic concerns, and for diffusing bliss thro social life. When a woman quits her own department, she offends her husband, not merely because she obtrudes herself upon his business, but because she departs from that sphere which is assigned her in the order of society (American Magazine, March 1788, p. 244).

Conclusion

This article has explored what message women found regarding their roles in society in three magazines in the new republic near the turn of the century. It has sought to determine if the publications portrayed women as political actors, much as the leading party newpapers of that era were doing, how they defined women's role, and if they challenged conventional wisdom on women's place.

None of the magazines studied portrayed women as politically active in any meaningful way. Such discussion was infrequent and isolated, and when it did occur, one likely had to infer the connection because of the vague nature of the commentary.

Generally, the message in the magazine was just the opposite, that women's place was in the home where the primary goal was to be amiable and compliant. Most talk of women influencing men was framed in relation to the reformation of

men's manners and keeping them happy at home.

Although women's education was discussed at length, the publications favored it for the most part because of the salutary effect it would have on men and children. The education had to be utilitarian and limited to prevent women from rising above their husbands in any way or neglecting their natural duties.

Both American Magazine and The Ladies Magazine, each directed in large part to women readers, shared the above sentiments. The latter seemed to offer a heavier dose of them because of the nature of the publication, which stressed the social essay and included less political material than did Webster's magazine. But for the most part, the two were similar in their portrayal of women's role. The same could be said for The Weekly Magazine, except that it carried fewer such articles because its focus was more literary. It did seem somewhat more enlightened in its attitude toward women, except for its mocking of the ideas of Wollstonecraft--ideas that earned at least faint praise in The Ladies Magazine six years earlier. A broader portrayal of women's political role in The Weekly Magazine's contemporary publications, the party press papers, seemed not to affect the magazine at all.

Overall, then, these publications were perservers of the status quo, not challengers of it. And yet there were those few instances when they talked of women as rational beings, capable of discerning truth, noting that only education differentiated them from men. They talked of extending women's influence and gaining respect and offered at least a few examples of women who

made politics work for them and women who did something other than stay at home.

These ideas might, it is true, have been small steps forward countered by great leaps back, since woman's role clearly was defined in relationship to her family. Yet the family is the building block of society. Webster himself said: "All government originates in families, and if neglected there, it will hardly exist in society" (American Magazine, March 1788, p. 210). As women were encouraged to stretch their influence within the family, they might have begun to think beyond. Charlotte "makes an excellent pudding," American Magazine told them, but she also was "a tolerable natural historian" (American Magazine, April 1788, p. 303). The Ladies Magazine advised that a woman should be like a "guardian angel" to her husband, but it also reported that Lady Mary Wortley Montague said if husbands and wives were separated in Paradise, "I fancy most [women] won't like it the worse for that" (Ladies Magazine, December 1792, p. 34; November 1792, p. 278). As the little sister at boarding school read her brother's stern letters about women's place, she also read about the woman sailor. She and others might have read these snippets and imagined more for themselves. And anything that could be imagined, could be enacted.

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